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ABSTRACT

Counseling men has been a focus of attention within counseling psychology for nearly two decades. As in other aspects of group work, there are a number of group factors that need to be considered when working with men in groups. One of these factors is type of group. Groups can be: awareness; support; skills specific or topic specific; or self-help. Operating considerations include: number of members of the group; leadership style; length of time of the group; whether the group will be open or closed; commitment to conflict or intimacy; meeting time; focus to include fun; ages of participants; makeup of the group (diverse or homogeneous); and the topical or open nature of the group. The selection process includes: description of the group; goals and commitment of participants; qualifications of members; empathy of participants; capability of tolerating conflict; verbal skills of the participants; and dependability of the participants. Another consideration is who not to invite to the group, including men who are manic, very depressed, in severe crisis, addicted, inebriated, or paranoid. Specific steps that apply to running men's groups include establishing personal groups and norms; developing opening and closing rituals; learning empathic listening skills; learning to give supportive feedback; learning to develop conflict initiation and resolution skills; and knowing how to play. Typical topical issues include: fathers and sons; courage; power; penises and sexuality; fathering; shame; isolation; male friendships; violence; money; spirituality; humor; and mothers and sons. (ABL)

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Counseling Men:

A University Campus Experience

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COUNSELING MEN: A UNIVERSITY CAMPUS EXPERIENCE

Introduction.

Counseling men has been a focus of attention within Counseling Psychology for nearly two decades. A group focus has been recognized as one of the major approaches for addressing men's issues and was the subject of Martin Wong's article "Males in transition and the self-help group" presented in the Counseling Psychologist in 1976 (Wong, 1976). As in other aspects of group work, there are a number of group factors that need to be considered when working with men in groups. Following are some general considerations for men's groups. These topics come from a variety of sources, including our own experience in group work, but also from published materials such as Roger Karsk and Bill Thomas, Working with men's groups (1987, Duluth,MN: Whole Person Press); Bill Kauth, Men's friends: How to organize and run your own men's support group (1991, Milwaukee, WI: Human Development Associates), and Martin Wong's article in the Counseling Psychologist.

1. What is the type of group?
    A. Awareness (or consciousness raising we used to call them). These are usually brief, one to five session groups that are designed to help people become aware of issues related to men. Generally led by a male who may be a therapist and who has had experience

addressing men's issues.

B. Support. Support groups are established to assist men who have defined personal growth goals and wish to work in a supportive male atmosphere to receive support for achieving the goals established. Support groups often form out of awarenesses that developed during awareness groups. These are generally peer conducted groups rather than led by professional therapists.

D. Skills Specific or Topic Specific. Examples include groups designed to address a specific issue related to men, such as Date-Rape or Acquaintance Rape Awareness groups or groups specifically addressing men's sexuality. Generally led by a counselor or other person presenting content specific information for men.

C. Self-Help. Sometimes referred to as therapy groups, these groups are established specifically to address problems men are experiencing in relationships, personal dilemmas with significant people in their lives, especially males, and to assist in specific solution focused problems. Generally led by a male counselor or therapist.

2. Operating Considerations

-What will be the number of members of the group? This will vary by the focus of the group, what leadership style will be used, and the length of meetings.

-Will the group be time limited or on-going? Many men's support groups have been ongoing for a number of years, whereas therapy groups are more likely to be limited in time to the problem area.

-Will the group be closed or open?

-Will there be a commitment to conflict or to intimacy?

-When will the group meet? Where? This helps determine who will be in the group (friends, acquaintances, clients, students).

-Will the focus of the group allow for fun? Is there a social component or is it to be strictly task oriented?

-What ages are invited to participate?

-Will the group be homogeneous or stress diversity? Race, SES, mutual interests, similar concerns, similiar family structure.

-Will the group be topical or open?

3. Selection process.

During the selection process there are a number of group dynamics considerations that must enter into the selection process. These include:

How are you describing the group?

Do men have their personal goals? Why do they want to be in the group?

What is the commitment of participants?

What are the personal qualifications of members? Are they willing to take responsibility for their feelings, actions?

Are they in touch with their emotional boundaries?

Do they have concern for others - empathy?

Are they capable of tolerating conflict?

Do they have the verbal skills to participate in a group format?

Are they dependable? Will they participate regularly?

4. Who to <u>not</u> invite into the group:

Manic men.

Very depressed.

In severe crisis.

Addicted, inebriated.

Paranoid.

5. Running a Group:

Some specific steps from group therapy literature that applies to running men's groups include:

Establishing personal groups early in the group.

Establishing group norms, groups expectations and rules.

Developing opening and closing rituals.

Learning empathic listening skills.

Learning to give effective supportive feedback.

Learning to develop conflict initiation and resolution skills.

Knowing how to play.

6. Typical Topcial Issues:

Fathers and sons

Courage

Power

Penises and sexuality

Fathering

Shame

Isolation

Male friendships

Violence

Money

Spirituality

Humor

Mothers and sons.

COUNSELING MEN: A UNIVERSITY COUNSELING EXPERIENCE

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